

Writing Prompts from Jo Watson Hackl, Author of *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* (Random House Children's Books)

Writing Exercise #1

- Think of something that scared you when you were little
- Write down:
 - Something you ate yesterday
 - The name of something in your bedroom
 - A color
 - Something smelly
 - An animal
- Write a fictional scene involving those elements that begins- "I never would have thought that. . ."

Writing Exercise #2

- Write down the name of a place where you weren't allowed to go when you were a child. Now imagine you went there.
- Write down:
 - One name that begins with the same letter as your first name
 - One name that begins with the same letter as your last name
 - An object you have in your backpack, purse, or briefcase right now that might surprise your friends.
 - An item you ate for breakfast this morning
- Incorporate those elements into a brief scene set in the place you wrote down. Begin your scene with "I know I wasn't supposed to . . ."

Writing Exercise #3

- Write down the name of your best childhood friend
- Think of a time when you were mad at him or her
- Write down:
 - An object that you associate with him or her

- Incorporate those elements into a short scene in which you write in the voice of your best friend about whatever caused you to be mad at him or her. Begin the scene with “Everything went crazy after. . . “

Some Writing Tips and Techniques:

- Give Yourself permission to write a really, really, bad first draft. Your goal in writing the first draft is just to get your ideas onto paper
- Treat your first draft as raw material from which to edit and pare down until your writing shines.
- Be brave! Write the scenes that scare you!
- Keep an ongoing idea journal with ideas for character names, setting details, story ideas, character quirks, plot, pacing and story structure ideas, ideas to increase tension and raise the stakes, ways that emotions present themselves in your body, and overheard dialog. You’ll never know when you can use them in your work.
- Complete a character questionnaire for each character in your work. I’ve included a character questionnaire in the handouts.
- Be sure to use all five senses in every scene. This helps to draw readers into your work.
- If you get stuck, brainstorm with family and friends. You never know what you can come up with.
- Try to write something every day, even if it’s just jotting down an idea.